Public Program: Jenni Sorkin on Art in California

As an institution dedicated to becoming the epicenter of California Art, Langson IMCA presents programming that strives to provoke questions around an expansive understanding of artmaking inspired by the Golden State.

On May 24, 2022, Langson IMCA welcomes Jenni Sorkin, PhD, art historian and preeminent scholar of California Art to UCI’s campus. Sorkin discusses her recent publication *Art in California*, a history of modern and contemporary art in California from the early 20th century to present day, part of the World of Art series published by Thames & Hudson. She highlights key aspects of her scholarship and the distinctive role that California has played in the history of American art, from early 20th century photography and Chicano mural painting to the fiber art movement and beyond. The talk is followed by a conversation moderated by Bridget R. Cooks, PhD, UCI professor of African American studies and art history.

**DATE:** Tuesday, May 24, 2022  
**TIME:** 4 – 5:30 pm  
**VENUE:** UC Irvine Campus, Humanities Gateway, Conference Room 1010  
**PARKING:** Mesa Parking Structure, 19514 Mesa Rd., Irvine 92617

This in-person program is **free and open to the public.**  
Registration is recommended as seating is limited. Please register here.  
For those not able to attend in person, the program is [available to view via Zoom](https://www.zoom.edu).
For more program information including detailed parking information and directions to campus, visit imca.uci.edu.

Featured Work: *Heisler Cove*

Langson IMCA looks forward to reopening its interim museum on June 11, 2022 with the exhibition *Variations of Place: Southern California Impressionism in the Early 20th Century*, which includes this month’s featured work, *Heisler Cove* (circa 1916), painted by George Gardner Symons.

Born George Gardner Simon in Chicago, IL around 1861, the artist changed his surname to Symons due to concerns about rising antisemitism. His formative years are not well-documented, but it is known that Symons attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he befriended William Wendt, and continued his studies in Paris, Munich, and London. Symons’s exposure to Impressionism in Europe had a lasting influence on his work, as evident in the expressive brushwork, vibrant color sense, and play of light observed in *Heisler Cove*, pictured above. He is most often classified as an American Impressionist. Local readers of *Monthly Muse* may be familiar with the painting’s Laguna Beach locale, which stretches north along the bluffs on Cliff Drive from Aster Street to what is now known as Diver’s Cove.

Symons was introduced to Southern California during a brief trip in the early 1880s and returned to Laguna Beach in 1896. His artist friend William Wendt followed in 1897 and they remained in the area painting and cultivating a like-minded community. In 1898, they set sail for England, and then Symons returned to California in 1903, purchasing property in Arch Beach (now part of Laguna Beach). He built the first studio in the coastal
art colony that included fellow *plein air* painters Frank Cuprien, Anna Althea Hills, Edgar Payne, and Wendt, among others, whose works are included in *Variations of Place*. Symons also maintained studios in Massachusetts and New York and may be best known for his paintings that depict the snowy winter landscapes of New England. But he always returned to California. Symons died in Hillside, NH in 1930.

Collection Works
In *Senses of Place*, editors and anthropologists Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso have assembled a selection of essays that consider “the experiential and expressive ways places are known, imagined, yearned for, held, remembered, voiced, lived, contested, and struggled over; and the multiple ways places are metonymically and metaphorically tied to identities.”

*Wetlands III* by Helen Lundeberg (1908 – 1999) and *Study of Monterey Bay* by E. Charlton Fortune (1885 – 1969), pictured above, are two examples of how artists in Langson IMCA’s permanent collection convey the myriad ways in which people encounter places, perceive them, and imbue them with meaning and significance. While each artist responds to and interprets landscape differently—in this case, the dusky pink and purple, undulating contours of Lundeberg’s quiet, planar wetlands and Fortune’s vibrantly felt and vividly imagined sensorial fusion of color, shape, and form—they both illuminate how place can be experienced and embodied.

In his essay “Wisdom Sits in Places,” Basso observes, “As places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed. When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination and where the mind may lead is anybody’s guess. . . . So too they give rise to their own aesthetic immediacies, their shifting moods and relevancies, their character and spirit. Even in total stillness places may seem to speak.”
Last Chance — Odeya Nini: A Solo Voice

In her recorded performance on view through May 31 online, artist in residence Odeya Nini establishes a dialogue among Langson IMCA's interim museum space, the works on view in the recent exhibition *The Resonant Surface: Movement, Image, and Sound in California Painting*, and the viewer. Nini reflected on her residency, remarking, "I was honored to have my vocal work recognized as relevant and aligned with the processes and practices of the artists in *The Resonant Surface* exhibition. Being in residence invited me to think about how my sound may illuminate detail, how it may be observed in a certain light and angle and how I shape my voice so that the listener may receive a certain visible message." Nini demonstrates yet another way that artists embody and experience place.
Musings
When I moved to California in 2016, I was shocked by the car culture. The speed, intensity, and congestion were like nothing I had experienced. *Santa Ana Arrows* by Roger Kuntz captures a glimpse of the vast automotive infrastructure that suffuses and shapes our everyday lives in the Orange County-Los Angeles megalopolis. The seemingly flat surface on which Kuntz marks linguistic symbols and icons (the stuff of so much Pop art) is all about space, depth, and tactility. What I notice here is the way a streak of daylight cuts across the center of the composition, leaving the corners in shadow. As opposed to the signage that I normally pass which is bathed in bright white light, Kuntz’s selective focus suggests surrounding architecture—nearby structures block out part of the daylight, exposing only a portion of the sign to its rays. How will this streak of light change as the sun moves through the sky? Where will I be when that happens? Long gone. Or maybe stuck in traffic.

Scott Volz, ’22, PhD (Visual Studies)
Graduate Curatorial and Research Assistant, Langson IMCA
Imagining Institutes & Museums

Earlier this spring, Langson IMCA Museum Director Kim Kanatani participated in Imagining Institutes & Museums, a recorded conversation organized by the Institute of Texan Cultures at University of Texas, San Antonio. Kanatani joined architect Ted Flato; lawyer, anthropologist, and museum leader Dr. Micah Parzen; design strategist and consultant Dana Mitroff Silvers; plus curator and scholar Dr. Susana Smith Bautista, who also served as the panel interlocutor. The panel considered how museums leverage the strengths and contributions of faculty, staff, and students for mutual benefit and extend their reach and impact beyond their immediate communities. Kanatani discussed aspects of Langson IMCA’s vision and the museum’s process of considering what it means by “California Art.”

Langson IMCA envisions becoming an epicenter for California Art—an inclusive, dynamic, artistic, and research hub for the campus and region. Through exhibitions, research initiatives, publications, educational programs, and community and cultural partnerships, it seeks to foster meaningful encounters with art and celebrate artists and their capacity to develop new forms and ideas in response to the California experience.

Learn more about the mission, future vision, and strategic ambitions of Langson IMCA in its concept plan: UC Irvine As The Place for California Art.

The founding collections donated by the Gerald E. Buck and Joan Irvine Smith families lay the groundwork and serve as a point of departure for the institute and museum’s investigation of California Art. Over the course of 18 months, Langson IMCA staff embarked on an intensive planning process, convening a series of roundtable discussions involving art historians, curators, artists, academics, institutional directors, and others who have thought deeply about the topic of California Art. Those conversations have had a profound impact on steering Langson IMCA’s future directions. Kanatani shared, “We were advised to think about California as a provocation, as a question: What is it that constitutes California Art, and why? [If we] frame the definition as a question rather than a definitive conclusion…[then] the museum and the institute can begin to serve as platforms for interrogating concepts and themes that give meaning to California and its art.”

Read Langson IMCA’s Approach to California Art | An Inaugural Point of View.

Editor’s note: At the time of the program’s recording and printing of the concept plan, Langson IMCA had not yet announced the naming gift from Jack and Shanaz Langson or the future site of the museum on UCI’s North Campus.
Upcoming Fall Exhibitions
Langson IMCA’s fall exhibition schedule opens on September 24, 2022 with two in-person exhibitions in two locations and another exhibition online.

Dispolve, curated by Bridget R. Cooks, PhD, features 22 works, including two new commissions, by artists who consider what it means to change from one form to another. Through painting, photography, sculpture, installation, and video, the works demonstrate how gradual and immediate changes impact viewers’ perceptions of self, one another, and the shared environment. The exhibition will be on view in the University Art Gallery on UCI’s campus through December 10, 2022.

Echoes of Perception: Peter Alexander and California Impressionism is organized by a team of curators comprising Kevin Appel, Julianne Gavino, Kim Kanatani, Curt Klebaum, Claudia Parducci, and Bruce Richards who have paired sculptural works and paintings by contemporary artist Peter Alexander (1939 – 2020) with collection works by late 19th and early 20th century California Impressionists. The resulting exhibition creates a dialogue between the early modernist painters and Alexander’s work, forming a fluid exchange among generations equally influenced by the atmospheric light of the Golden State. The exhibition will be on view in Langson IMCA’s interim museum location from September 24, 2022 through January 10, 2023.
With an aim to make its collection of California Impressionist artworks more accessible to audiences, Langson IMCA has also commissioned the design studio Imaginary Places to create a digital installation that conveys the wonder of California Impressionist painting beyond the museum’s physical walls. This resulting “work-of-works,” titled *Virtually Radiant*, is a curated online experience featuring over 30 paintings from Langson IMCA’s collection that serve as inspiration to other artists, writers, and musicians. Visitors can join the online experience beginning October 13, 2022. The installation is designed to be augmented over time through collaborative participation and will be accessible through September 12, 2025.

Learn more about upcoming exhibitions on Langson IMCA’s website and in future issues of *Monthly Muse*.

Contribute Your Voice

Langson IMCA has commissioned a new work by Bay Area artist Linda Gass for the upcoming exhibition, *Dissolve*, curated by Bridget R. Cooks, PhD, UCI associate professor of African American studies and art history. Gass’s textile and sound installation, *When we listen to the watershed*, is inspired by the research of Valerie Olson, PhD, UCI professor of anthropology, examining how the Santa Ana River Watershed has changed over time. Olson was a principal investigator and author of *Santa Ana River Watershed Community Water Experiences: An Ethnographic Strengths and Needs Assessment*. This 2019 report includes the perspectives and personal experiences from some of the approximately six million residents who live across the Watershed and give voice to what they see as their community’s strengths and needs. The project “focuses on capacity building by working with community members, elected officials, and water agencies to strengthen community
“Engagement.” It has utilized a grassroots approach to give residents agency in decision-making around water needs in their neighborhoods (*Santa Ana Watershed Community Water Ethnography*, Haydee Yonamine, November 2018 – June 2019).

Linda Gass invites *Monthly Muse* readers to contribute to the creation of *When we listen to the watershed* by recording the words of residents quoted in the report. These recordings are intended to animate the comments shared by Watershed community members and enrich the multimodal experience of the artwork. To learn more about the commission or to express interest in participating, send an email to SantaAnaRiver@gmail.com. Please note that participation requires access to a voice recording app (e.g., Voice Memo on Apple’s iPhone) and the deadline to submit recordings is May 27, 2022.

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**SAVE THE DATE: UCI Giving Day 2022**

UCI Giving Day is right around the corner. The annual event takes place on May 18, 2022 and this year Langson IMCA is asking for your help to increase access to art through digital innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear the importance of offering alternative pathways to experience art beyond the gallery walls.

We’re committed to making our resources more broadly accessible to the community, from content-rich e-newsletters like *Monthly Muse* to virtual exhibitions, digitized databases, and more. You can read here about a special digital initiative we intend to launch this year.

**Please join us on May 18 to help visitors engage with art in unexpected places through the creative application of technology.**

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**Image credits**

Jenni Sorkin. Photo by Sabine Schlosser. Courtesy of Jenni Sorkin

Helen Lundeberg, *Blue Planet*, 1965, Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 in. The Marilynn and Carl Thoma Collection © Feitelson / Lundeberg Art Foundation. Courtesy of Jenni Sorkin

George Gardner Symons, *Heisler Cove*, circa 1916, Oil on panel, 17 x 21 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Institute and Museum of California Art


E. Charlton Fortune, *Study of Monterey Bay*, circa 1918, Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. UC Irvine Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum

Roger Kuntz, *Santa Ana Arrows, From the series Sign*, circa 1962, Oil on canvas, 60 x 72 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Institute and Museum of California Art, © Mary Kuntz 8/13/2018


Langson IMCA Concept Plan and Langson IMCA’s Approach to “California Art”: An Inaugural Point of View, 2021. Photo by Julie DelliQuanti © The Regents of the University of California
Still from *Imagining Institutes and Museums*, 2022

Sonia Romero, *Inner Landscape*, 2011, Silkscreen, 25 x 41 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Institute and Museum of California Art © Sonia Romero

Peter Alexander, *1/24/20 Pink Orange Block*, 2020, Urethane, 11 x 8 x 8 in. Courtesy of the Estate of Peter Alexander © The Estate of Peter Alexander


Prado Managed Wetlands, Santa Ana River Basin, July 2021. Photo by Linda Gass